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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000383

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SUBJECT: LTTE LEADER BREAKS NO NEW GROUND IN MEETING WITH
NORWEGIAN AMBASSADOR

REF: COLOMBO 342

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Norwegian Ambassador briefed Co-Chair ambassadors March 7 on his visit to Killinochi earlier this week. LTTE political chief Tamilselvan warned that a push by the Sri Lankan military in the North would produce aggressive retaliation by the LTTE. He criticized the international community for not exerting stronger pressure on the GSL to cease offensive military action. Tamilselvan expressed little confidence in the ability of the All Party Conference to lay the foundation for a political settlement to the conflict. He dismissed GSL efforts to resettle internally displaced persons in the North and East. Tamilselvan reiterated the LTTE's denial of responsibility for the attack on diplomats Batticaloa on February 27 and accused the GSL of "criminal negligence" in allowing the group to enter a "war zone." End Summary

Northern Offensive Would Bring Aggressive Retaliation

¶2. (C) On March 7, Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar briefed Co-Chair ambassadors on his March 5-6 visit to Killinochi to meet with Liberation Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) Political Chief Tamilselvan. The visit was the most recent in a series of trips by Brattskar to the Vanni approximately every six weeks as part of Norway's peace facilitation role. Tamilselvan focused on the LTTE's belief that the GSL is preparing for a major military offensive in the North. He criticized the international community for not exerting greater pressure on the GSL to halt offensive military actions. Tamilselvan said he wanted to place the international community on notice that an attack on the LTTE in the North would result in aggressive retaliation. He maintained that the LTTE has held back from a major offensive

of its own until now out of a desire to preserve what is left of the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA). He asked Brattskar to urge the Co-Chairs and India to press the GSL to cease offensive military actions and observe the CFA. Ambassador Brattskar replied that the international community believes the conflict cannot be solved militarily and that a political settlement is the only solution. He emphasized that there will be no international tolerance of terrorist acts by the LTTE.

No Faith in All-Party Conference

¶3. (C) Tamilselvan professed little confidence in the All Party Conference (APC) process as the path to a political solution. In fact, he dismissed the APC by saying there is only one party (the President's Sri Lanka Freedom Party) left in the country. Tamilselvan maintained that the international community is naive to pin its hopes on the APC.

Brattskar countered that the international community is realistic about the APC, and believes it represents the best prospect for peace.

¶4. (C) Tamilselvan was dismissive of GSL efforts to resettle internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the North and East, saying he does not believe the government will resettle IDPs in their original homes. He expressed, as he has on several previous occasions, concern about Sinhalese colonization in the East. He said that IDPs from Vakari are afraid to return there due to a strong Sri Lankan military presence in the area. He contended that Muslims were allowed

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to move back to Muttur only as a result of pressure on the GSL by Muslim political leaders. He despaired of the conditions for Tamil civilians in Jaffna, which he called a "de facto prison".

LTTE Denies Responsibility for Attack on Diplomats

¶5. (C) Turning to the LTTE's attack on diplomats, UN representatives, and government officials in Batticaloa on February 27, Tamilselvan said LTTE leader Prabakaran was shocked to learn that foreign diplomats were included in the delegation and wanted all concerned to know that it was emphatically not the LTTE's intention to target them. The area where their helicopter landed was a war zone and it was highly irresponsible, he maintained, of the GSL not to use the UN and ICRC as a channel of communication to the LTTE prior to the visit. He characterized the failure of the GSL to follow established notification practices as "criminal negligence." Tamilselvan maintained that early on the morning of February 27 there was outgoing artillery fire by the Sri Lankan military from both the Batticaloa air base, where the party intended to land, and from Weber Stadium, two kilometers away, where the party did land. He said the Sri Lankan military has several times in recent weeks launched artillery fire from these sites and the LTTE has responded. Therefore, he asserted, it should not have come as a surprise to the GSL that there would be incoming LTTE fire at Weber Stadium when the party landed there.

Tough Times in the Vanni

¶6. (C) While in Killinochi, Ambassador Brattskar visited the District General Hospital, where he was briefed that medicine is in critically short supply. He also met with several UN agencies, including UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Food Program (WFP), who are working in Killinochi. They reported that food stockpiles in the Vanni are extremely

limited and that in a crisis supplies would run out almost immediately. They noted that malnutrition is 8% higher in the Vanni than in the rest of the country. The UN representatives noted that, while Killinochi is still relatively safe, there are regular aerial bombings in the Vanni. The UNICEF representative reported that he was told by the LTTE that they had stopped recruitment of soldiers who were born after January 1, 1990, meaning that by next year recruitment of soldiers under 18 years of age would cease.

17. (C) Comment: Tamilselvan broke little new ground in this meeting with the Norwegian facilitators. While Brattskar, like many observers, is not optimistic about progress toward a peaceful settlement in the next six to 12 months, he believes the currently strong public support for the government's military campaign is thin and could dissipate in the coming future. As for the February 27 incident in Batticaloa, it is entirely possible that the GSL wanted to demonstrate its control of the East by not going through channels to alert the LTTE of the visit by diplomats. Clearly, both sides share responsibility for the mishap - the GSL for not taking adequate precautions and the LTTE for firing on the aircraft.
BLAKE